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C O N F I D E N T I A L CARACAS 003817

SIPDIS

NSC FOR CBARTON  
USCINCSO ALSO FOR POLAD  
STATE PASS USAID FOR DCHA/OTI

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TAGS: [ELAB](#) [PGOV](#) [PHUM](#) [VE](#)

SUBJECT: VISIT TO MASS MARKET AND BOLIVARIAN SCHOOL

Classified By: Abelardo A. Arias, Political Counselor,  
for Reasons 1.4(b).

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Summary  
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11. (C) Caracas' El Coche food market is a blend of formal, informal, public and private economies. Accompanied by members of the NGO Asociacion Nina Madre (Child Mother Association, ANM), poloff visited the market December 7 to observe child labor conditions there. More than a dozen children aged 5 to 13 sold produce performed menial tasks in the market. The ANM reps also showed poloff a model government "Bolivarian School," nearby. At the school, walls were decorated with references to children's rights and the need to "rescue" Venezuelan values. In one classroom full of world flags, the U.S. flag was conspicuously missing. End summary.

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Food Distribution Center A Hub of Social Ills  
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12. (U) Poloff visited a sprawling retail-wholesale food market in the early morning of December 7 accompanied by Marta Moronte and Gladys Madriz, directors of the NGO Asociacion Nina Madre (The Child Mother Association, ANM). ANM holds workshops and training classes to help young girls avoid premature pregnancy and help young mothers cope with the challenges of raising children. The market is located in the lower-middle class neighborhood of El Coche and is ringed by lower class slums on nearby hills. Hundreds of wholesalers from throughout Venezuela come to the market with agricultural products, mostly for sale to small grocery stores. Clientele to the market is a mixture of middle and lower class. The Municipal Caracas Police have an office on site and were observed making rounds in the market. Several commercial banks have branch offices on the premises for facilitating the cash deposits generated by the sales.

13. (C) Poloff observed more than a dozen children between 5 and 13 years old working as errand boys and selling products in outdoor stalls. One child told us he had been working since 3 a.m. and was not enrolled in a school (some boys indicated they did attend school). Madriz said some children pick through piles of rejected produce for items to sell on the street. In the night hours, Madriz said, young girls are hawked, often by their family members, to the truck drivers parked outside the market prior to opening. Madriz and Moronte also claimed that drug use is rampant in the market, and children often serve as mules. One vendor complained that very young children -- as young as three years old -- are working as street performers at the entrance to the highway that runs near the market.

14. (C) The GOV operates a large building on the market grounds with more than one hundred storage or retail sites. The hallways of the building are painted in yellow, red, and black, the colors of President Hugo Chavez's Fifth Republic Movement (MVR) party. The government-subsidized goods for sale appeared to be of good quality and reportedly priced lower than the private sector. Moronte said that prior to the August 15 presidential recall referendum, shopping in this part of the market required MVR membership. Moronte said that requirement was dropped because "Chavez owns everything now." Poloff observed Ministry of Defense trucks loading products supposedly for sale in the GOV subsidized markets known as "Mercals." Poloff also saw an office nearby for "Barrio Adentro," the GOV medical program for poor areas; the Cuban doctor, according to a sign on the door, was on vacation.

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Bolivarian School A Model of Order  
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15. (U) Poloff also visited a Bolivarian School, with grades first through sixth, where ANM holds workshops. Bolivarian Schools receive special funding and offer breakfast, lunch

and a snack, a rarity among public schools. The buildings had been remodeled and were well maintained, in stark contrast to the surrounding rundown slum. The students wore uniforms and seemed to have well supplied classrooms. The

school's interior was decorated with references to the children's rights contained in the Bolivarian Constitution. One bulletin board read "Together, with the family and school, we are rescuing our values." The values included participation, cooperation, responsibility, and solidarity. Another said, "I am honest because my family, school, and environment help me train myself."

16. (U) The school's assistant principal said the GOV also used the facility for other educational programs, including Mission Robinson (literacy), Mission Ribas (high school), and Mission Sucre (college). Poloff observed several television sets with video players in the classrooms. In a sixth grade class, the students were practicing handwriting by copying articles of the Bolivarian Constitution out of the trademark blue booklets often flashed by President Hugo Chavez. An exhibition entitled "Traveling Through The Countries Of The World" contained a stylized globe with a projection that occluded North America. Flags of the nations included Cuba, Iraq, and China, but not the United States. Poloff also noticed the older classes were supplied with the Bolivarian libraries, sets of books produced last year in cooperation with the Government of Cuba.

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Comment  
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17. (C) What was noticeable about this trip to the barrio is that the level of political propaganda has been ratcheted down compared to pre-referendum levels. As for the children working in the market, while there was a sense that perhaps things could be better, their activity was not the object of repudiation. We had heard from Chavez critics that the Bolivarian Schools are indoctrinating poor children in revolutionary thought. The visit suggested the schools' approach, when there is an attempt to inject ideology, is likely to be subtle, as evident in the absence of U.S. flags in the school.

Brownfield

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